



# Identifying Gifted Learners



## Who is the Gifted Learner?

Section 162.675. RSMo defines gifted children as “those children who exhibit precocious development of mental capacity and learning potential as determined by competent professional evaluation to the extent that continued educational growth and stimulation could best be served by an academic environment beyond that offered through a standard grade level curriculum.”

A gifted learner is one who

- exhibits precocious capacity and learning potential;
- is identified by competent professionals; and
- needs an academic environment beyond standard grade level curriculum.

## Why is Gifted Education Important?

Gifted and talented students need an academic environment to meet their learning needs so they can make continuous progress in school. They need

- challenging curriculum;
- meaningful enrichment;
- accelerated learning opportunities; and
- appropriate social and emotional support.

The myth that “gifted students will do fine on their own” is not supported by research. Gifted students need services provided by well-trained teachers, who challenge and support them, in order to fully develop their gifts and talents.

## Characteristics of Gifted Students

- **Interests:** intense and sometimes unusual
- **Motivation:** evidence of desire to learn
- **Humor:** conveys and picks up on humor
- **Problem-Solving:** effective and inventive strategies
- **Inquiry:** questions, experiments, explores
- **Memory:** large storehouse of information on school or non-school topics
- **Imagination/Creativity:** produces many ideas; highly original
- **Insight:** quickly grasps new concepts and makes connections; senses deeper meanings
- **Reasoning:** logical approaches to figuring out solutions
- **Communication:** highly expressive (with words, numbers, or symbols)

*A New Window for Looking at Gifted Children*, Javits project, September 1995, Number RM95222: <https://nrcgt.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/953/2015/04/rm95222.pdf>

## Asynchronous Development

Gifted learners come in a variety of shapes and sizes, but they share a common characteristic: asynchronous development, the mismatch between cognitive, emotional, and physical development. This defining characteristic means that gifted students can develop unevenly across skill levels. For example, a gifted child might excel in math but struggle in reading-- or vice versa. Their cognitive skills might be quite advanced, but other areas of development, such as fine motor or social skills, may be lagging.

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*“Hide not your Talents, they for Use were made.  
What’s a Sun-Dial in the shade!”*

- Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanack*, 1750

# How Do We Identify Gifted Learners?

Identifying gifted students is complex and must be completed by professionals who are trained in gifted education and educational assessment. On the first page of this document the term *gifted student* is defined, characteristics are briefly described, and asynchronous development is explained. The goal of the gifted identification process is to find the students who are gifted and will benefit from services.

The identification process begins with **universal screening**, a strategy that examines every student at a given grade level for potential.

Once students are screened, some are selected for **further evaluation**. Data is collected in four areas:

1. General mental ability
2. Academic achievement
3. Creativity, Reasoning, and/or Problem Solving
4. Other documented evidence of exceptional performance in a general academic area, a fine arts area, or another area related to the design of the gifted program

The [Gifted Education Program Guidelines](#) document provides more detail on the identification process.

It is important to note that school systems make local decisions and may choose test instruments and develop processes that best fit local needs. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and the Advisory Council on the Education of Gifted and Talented Children provide guidance and support. Beyond the *Gifted Education Program Guidelines* mentioned above, please consult these documents:

- [Identifying and Serving Traditionally Underrepresented Gifted Students](#)
- [Using Local Norms to Equitably Identify Gifted Learners](#)

Please visit DESE's [Gifted Education website](#) for more information.

## Ensuring Equitable Identification

School systems work hard to find every gifted learner in their school boundaries by using a variety of strategies.

- Utilizing valid, reliable, and current tests
  - Reviewing data in collaborative teams of professionals trained in gifted education and assessment
  - Screening all students in targeted grade levels (universal screening)
  - Collecting a body of evidence in all four areas listed above
  - Developing an alternate identification plan that includes the use of local norms
  - Reviewing data regularly to ensure that the students served in the gifted program reflect the students in the school system
  - Sharing information about the gifted program selection process with parents and the community
- (Additional strategies may be employed.)



## Parent/Guardian Review Process

According to Section 162.720.4 RSMo, “any district with a gifted education program...shall have a policy, approved by the board of education of the district, that establishes a process that outlines the procedures and conditions under which parents or guardians may request a review of the decision that determined that their child did not qualify to receive services through the district's gifted education program.”



For more information on gifted education in Missouri, or an electronic version of this handout, please visit our website or contact Christine Nobbe, Director of Gifted Education.

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Website: <https://dese.mo.gov/quality-schools/gifted-education>

Please contact your local school system for specific information regarding the gifted program identification process.